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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE
RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 227th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 19 February 1997, at 3.45 p.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. ANNAN
(Secretary-General of
the United Nations)

Chairman: Mr. KA (Senegal)

CONTENTS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT OBSERVER FOR PALESTINE /...

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CONTENTS (continued)

DRAFT PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE COMMITTEE FOR 1997

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE CONSULTATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF NGO COORDINATING COMMITTEES

OTHER MATTERS

The meeting was called to order at 3.45 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

2. Mr. ABDELLAH (Tunisia) nominated Mr. Ka (Senegal) for re-election to the office of Chairman, and Mr. Farhadi (Afghanistan) and Mr. Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba) for re-election to the offices of Vice-Chairmen.

3. Mr. ZLENKO (Ukraine) seconded the nominations.

4. Mr. KA (Senegal), Mr. Farhadi (Afghanistan) and Mr. Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba) were elected by acclamation.

5. Mr. KA (Senegal) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

6. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that the General Assembly, at its fifty-first session, had reaffirmed the mandate from which the Committee derived. In recent years, courageous new steps had been taken in the Middle East as a result of the peace process launched in Madrid in 1991, the signing by the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, and subsequent agreements, in particular, the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the previous month, the peace process had gained important momentum as a result of the agreement reached on the Hebron Protocol and the Israeli and Palestinian undertakings on other key issues. Once again, he congratulated Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu on the progress which they had made together.

7. The agreements reached over the past three and a half years were signposts of crucial importance along the road towards peaceful Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. They had led to the emergence of new realities on the ground, such as the establishment of an elected Palestinian administration in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank in 1996. Despite occasional setbacks, the vision inherent in the Declaration of Principles had largely been sustained. It was now of the utmost importance not to dissipate those achievements, but to build on them in order to fulfil the hopes of all peoples in the region. In order for the Middle East peace process to flourish, progress was also required in the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. That would be crucial for the realization of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It was his hope that those negotiations would resume quickly.

8. Promoting Palestinian economic and social development was essential in order to improve living conditions, especially in the Gaza Strip, and create solid foundations for peace. The United Nations system was making an important

contribution in that area, with a special emphasis on employment generation and Palestinian institution-building. Nevertheless, more could be done. He had recently appointed Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan as Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories. In the next few weeks, Mr. Gharekhan would work closely with the Palestinian Authority to identify areas in which the United Nations could enhance its contribution in the economic and social fields.

9. In conclusion, he expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the Committee in pursuit of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. He was grateful to the Committee for the flexibility which it had shown in response to the financial crisis by exercising restraint in its use of resources.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

10. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of Senegal, said that recent political events had shown the extent to which the question of Palestine remained at the heart of the Middle East conflict. It was clear that peace and stability in the region depended on a just and comprehensive settlement of that conflict on the basis of international agreements and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

11. The signing by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization of the Hebron Protocol on 15 January 1997 and the recent release of Palestinian women political prisoners strengthened the Committee in its belief that, given the will of the parties concerned and a firm commitment and encouragement from all friends of peace, full implementation of all the agreements could be achieved.

12. The course of the peace process had underscored the importance to the parties concerned of the firm support of all those in the international community, and particularly in the United Nations, who were working for the cause of peace. For that reason, as the phase of negotiations dealing with the sensitive issues of a final settlement began, the international community must intensify its efforts to support and sustain the process, with a view to the full restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

13. The year 1997 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the military occupation of the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the partition resolution (181 (II)). It was to be hoped that the year would herald clear and irreversible progress towards the building of a future independent Palestinian State and the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the region.

14. For its part, the Committee would pursue its unceasing efforts, in close cooperation with the Permanent Observer for Palestine, work persistently to strengthen its relations with all United Nations bodies, Member States and non-governmental organizations concerned with the question of Palestine, in order to further the achievement of the final goals of peace, stability, security and development.

15. In conclusion, he thanked the non-governmental organizations throughout the world for their active defence of the rights of the Palestinian people, and

expressed gratitude to the Department of Public Information and the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat.

STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT OBSERVER FOR PALESTINE

16. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) said that the presence of the Secretary-General testified to the importance of the Committee's mandate. The United Nations had not only supported the conclusion of peace accords and the enforcement of international law relating to Palestinian rights, but had also provided direct and invaluable assistance to the Palestinian people. It was his hope that, despite recent setbacks, a just and lasting peace would be achieved in the Middle East, with the help of the United Nations.

DRAFT PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE COMMITTEE FOR 1997 (A/AC.183/1997/CRP.1)

17. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the draft programme of work of the Committee for 1997 (A/AC.183/1997/CRP.1), adding that the Bureau had recently met the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information and his staff to discuss the special information programme of the Department of Public Information for 1997. On that occasion, the Bureau had stressed the importance of implementing all provisions of the special programme on the question of Palestine on the basis of resolution 51/25 of 4 December 1996.

18. Mr. QADRUD-DIN (Department of Public Information) said that the 1997 special information programme on the question of Palestine had a dual objective: to provide assistance to Palestinian media practitioners and to disseminate information to the Palestinian territories and around the world on United Nations activities on the question of Palestine. In connection with the first objective a Palestinian Media Practitioners Training Programme (aimed at upgrading the professional skills of young Palestinians working in all the mass media) would be held again in 1997. In order to fulfil the second objective, the Department would sponsor an International Encounter for Journalists on the Question of Palestine, in Athens, and a Fact-Finding News Mission for Journalists to Middle East capitals, most likely Amman and Cairo, and, if feasible, the Gaza Strip. In the interest of economy, participants in the Mission would be selected from among those attending the Encounter.

19. Publications of the Department would include a document on the outcome of the Encounter and, if funds were available, updates of some of its existing publications. The Department's Video Section (Media Division) would dispatch a team to the Palestinian territories to gather material for a documentary on the Department's training programme for Palestinian journalists. An effort would also be made to establish a small video library on issues relating to the question of Palestine.

20. The draft programme of work of the Committee for 1997 (A/AC.183/1997/CRP.1) was adopted.

21. The 1997 special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information was adopted.

22. The CHAIRMAN said that, on the basis of the Bureau's recommendation, he would take it that the Committee decided to re-establish the Working Group as in the past, under the chairmanship of the Rapporteur of the Committee and the vice-chairmanship of Mr. Syed Akbarrudin of India.

23. It was so decided.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE CONSULTATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF NGO COORDINATING COMMITTEES

24. The CHAIRMAN reported that the Bureau had held consultations with 22 representatives of non-governmental organizations from the International, North American and European NGO Coordinating Committees at United Nations Headquarters on 3 and 4 February. In keeping with its decision the year before to change the format of the meeting, the Bureau had emphasized policies and strategies to be pursued by non-governmental organizations beyond the organization of specific events. Accordingly, it had briefed the representatives of the non-governmental organizations on political developments and on the Committee's concerns and objectives, emphasizing the need to strengthen cooperation between the non-governmental organizations and the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights. It hoped to develop effective mechanisms to that end. The Bureau had also stressed that the annual symposia and meetings of non-governmental organizations should be viewed as a tool for achieving common goals and had offered a number of suggestions for improving the usefulness of those events.

25. The representatives of non-governmental organizations had, in turn, provided useful information on their activities, pointing out that the symposia and international meetings were highlights in their support of the cause of the Palestinian people. There was general agreement that priorities for the immediate future should include promoting the implementation of the agreements concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization; supporting Palestinian positions with regard to the permanent status negotiations, in particular the right to self-determination and the issues of settlements, Jerusalem and refugees; and advancing projects to assist the Palestinian people to achieve sustainable development.

26. Representatives of non-governmental organizations made suggestions with a view to improving their cooperation with the Committee, and on topics for discussion at their symposia and international meetings. In particular, they planned to mobilize further support by commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in June; the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) in November; and, the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the intifadah in December. In that connection, a suggestion had been made to hold the North American NGO Symposium from 9 to 11 June in New York rather than at the end of June in order to coincide more closely with the anniversary of the 1967 six-day war. The Bureau, in consultation with the Division, would begin preparing the programme for the event in order to enable non-governmental organizations to promote it to their constituencies.

27. Representatives of the Asian and international non-governmental organizations had promised to cooperate with the Committee in organizing the Asian seminar and NGO symposium, to be held in Indonesia. The event would have to be publicized widely, particularly since many members of non-governmental organizations would be unable to attend due to financial difficulties.

28. A change in the venue of the European Symposium and the International Meeting had been discussed in response to requests that international meetings should be held in the Middle East and the European Symposium in a Western European country. The Bureau would submit proposals in that regard to the Committee, following the necessary consultations; in the meantime, the Division and the respective Coordinating Committees would begin to prepare the substantive aspects of those meetings. The Division staff had also outlined various aspects of the Division's programme of work with a view to enhancing cooperation with the non-governmental organizations. The Bureau had been impressed by the commitment of the non-governmental organizations to the cause of the Palestinian people.

OTHER MATTERS

29. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine), briefing Committee members on recent political developments, said that the Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron and the Note for the Record which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel had signed on 15 January, constituted a major stride forward. Israeli forces had already withdrawn from 80 per cent of the city of Hebron. The Palestinians, who, from the outset, had stressed consistency and compliance with all agreements, welcomed the fact that the Protocol differed very little from the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

30. Eight subcommittees had begun discussing outstanding issues relating to the transition period, such as the release of Palestinian prisoners, the operation of the airport, the building of the seaport, the financial rights of Palestinians and, most importantly, freedom of movement of persons and goods, particularly guaranteed safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Serious disagreement had already arisen over the first of three successive redeployments of Israeli troops, scheduled to take place on 7 March, under the Interim Agreement and designed to keep Israelis confined to agreed military locations. The Israeli side was proposing completely unacceptable formulas; he hoped the Committee would continue to monitor the situation.

31. He also expressed the hope that negotiations on a final settlement, scheduled to begin in early March, would take place on time and proceed normally. That, however, would depend largely on whether the Israelis continued to build illegal settlements, in defiance of international law and the will of the international community. It would also depend on whether they continued their illegal actions in Jerusalem, including the building of settlements and the cancellation of the residence rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites who had lived there for generations.

32. The situation in Jerusalem had repeatedly been brought to the attention of the Security Council, most recently with regard to the Israeli plan to build settlements in the heart of East Jerusalem in the Ras Al-Amud district and the opening of an entrance to the tunnel in the vicinity of Al Aqsa Mosque. The tunnel remained open, even though Security Council resolution 1073 (1996) called for the immediate reversal of all acts which had resulted in the aggravation of the situation. A more dangerous development still was the fact that Israeli officials had signalled their intention to build a settlement in the Jabal Abu-Ghaneim district of East Jerusalem. The issue had already been considered by the Security Council in May 1995, together with the Israeli expropriation orders of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem. Unfortunately, at that time, the Council had been unable to adopt a resolution because of the veto of one permanent member. The issue was now threatening to undermine the entire peace process. His delegation would enter into consultations at the United Nations, particularly with the Arab Group of States, in an effort to avert the implementation of the Israeli plan. He hoped that the Committee would contribute to those consultations.

33. President Arafat would visit Washington on 3 March to meet with President Clinton, following on the heels of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, and President Mubarak of Egypt and King Hussein of Jordan would also be coming to Washington. He expressed the hope that all those meetings would lead to an improvement in the overall situation.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.